

THE LATER INCARNATIONS OF KHALKHA *ĴEBCUNDAMBA XUTAGT*

THE SECOND INCARNATION

The father of the second head of the Mongolian Buddhist church Darxan čin wan Dondobdorĵi lived at the court in Beijing. His second wife was a 19 year old Mongolian girl. Öndör Gegēn already predicted it while he was alive that the next incarnation would be born from their union. The new incarnation was born in the year of the water dragon in 1724 and, according to lore, at the time of his birth the whole yurt was illuminated by yellow light from the smoke hole, while a rainbow also appeared over the felt tent.

The list of miraculous signs had not ended there. Shortly after the child's birth the father suddenly got ill. The family asked the Naro bančin *qutuytu* (Khalkha *xutagt*) to help them to heal Darxan čin wan and save him from death. From the delegation sent to him, the lama asked about what they had done with the placenta after the birth. After their reply that they buried it Naro Panchen declared that that was what caused the illness. His advice was to dig out the placenta and present it with an offering. After the family did as he said it was revealed that the placenta miraculously smelled like flowers long after the delivery and after the offering ritual and the illness ceased as well.

Meanwhile, they conducted the official searching process as well in order to find the new incarnation of the head of the Buddhist church. The delegation tasked with the search for the successor reached Tibet in 1724 and brought with them the names of the four candidates that were selected. After they examined the four potential candidates they declared that the Darxan čin wan family was the "oldest" among the Khalkha Mongol noble families. Based on this riddle-like answer, it was safe to reason that the incarnation could be none other than Darxan čin wan's child.

When the delegation travelled from Tibet to Beijing, the emperor had a dream in which Öndör Gegēn appeared to him and told him that Darxan čin wan's wife gave birth to him. Since every miraculous sign pointed in the direction that the incarnation was most probably born into a Mongolian noble family and the delegation informed the emperor Yongzheng (1678-1735, reign 1722-1735, Mong. *Nayiraltu töb*, Khakha: *Nayralt töw*) about it, he approved of the inauguration. The Panchen Lama gave the new incarnation the *Luvsandanbīdonmi* (Tib. *blo bzang bstan pa'i sgron me*) monastic name.

The delegation sent to Tibet arrived back to the Khalkha region during the summer of 1725. At the time, the child was only one and a half years old; thus, he could not take his rightful place yet and stayed with his family. At the age of four, Nawanlobsang started to teach the Khalkha Donxor *xutagt*. With his help and guidance the child took his monastic vows; then, in 1729 he was elevated to the throne of the head of the Buddhist church.

During the early 1730s, due to the attacks led by Galdanceren (?-1745) Oirat khan against the Khalkha Mongols territory the *Bogd* was not safe. He intended to pay his

respects to the Manchu emperor; however, due to the continuing Oirat threats he rather moved to Dolōn-nūr, where he spent the next three years. He did not meet the Manchu ruler, because Yongzheng died that year.

The new emperor Qianlong's (1711-1799, reign 1736-1796, Mong. Tngri-yi tedkügsen, Khalkha: Tengrīg tetgegsen, Tib. lha skyong rgyal po) ascendance to the throne provided a new opportunity for the *Bogd* to pay a complimentary visit to Beijing. Soon, the emperor's invitation indeed arrived and the Mongolian head lama promptly complied. On the Manchu emperor's orders a high official (*amban*) gave a blue *xadag* in the name of the emperor as a form of welcome to the Mongolian guest on his arrival to the capital. In Beijing, the head lama was received with great respect and following Mongolian tradition he was housed in a yurt that specifically got refurbished just for him.

In 1738, the ministry tasked with the Mongolian administration, the Lifan Yuan officially recognized the new incarnation as the next *ḡebcundamba* and they handed him the golden seal (Mong. *altan tamay-a*) that was considered as the symbol of the Mongol Buddhist head lama's power. Thereafter, the official inauguration of the head lama of the Mongol Buddhist church was carried out by handing over this symbol and with the emperor's official approval.

The new church leader's activities were depicted as accompanied by miraculous deeds in his numerous biographies. It was rumored that his monasteries and church were not financed by the taxes imposed on the nomadic herders, but that the masters of the Altai and Khangai mountains gave him all the gold and silver he needed. In 1739, he established a *dacan* (Tib. *grva tshang*) in Xūrē, the capital at the time, for the tantric Buddhist school. He founded or rebuilt several monasteries and churches in Urga as well as in the countryside. In 1745, he established the *Jūd dacan* in the capital; in 1750, the Manjšir (Skr. Mañjuśrī) monastery which became one of Mongolia's biggest and most important monasteries. In 1756, he also established the Dašičoimbil (Daščoimbil) *dacan*.

Beijing worriedly watched the Mongolian church leader's growing popularity and, thus, the continuous growth of his influence on politics. This was in evident contrast with Manchu interests, since while Öndör Gegēn's 1691 engagement, more than anything, helped strengthening the Manchu influence, the growing recognition of the following *ḡebcundambas* weakened the Manchu's position. The court ordered officers to the new head lama to limit him; however, these measures only yielded partial results. During the outbreak (1755) of the revolt led by Amursana (1723-1757, Khakha: Amarsana), the Manchu dynasty used the prestige of the Mongolian church leader as well in order to stave off the independence movements spreading among the Khalkhas in the wake of the Oirat rebellion. They even gave new titles to the head of the Buddhist church; thus, indirectly proving the authority of the dynasty.

Naturally, this did not diminish his influence over the Mongols. Though the second incarnation initially tried to stay away from the happenings and instead promoted peaceful acceptance of the Manchu rule, by the end of his life he gravitated more and more to the rebels' side. After the Čingünjaw (1710-1757) led Anti-Qing rebellion (1756-57) the Beijing court issued an imperial order (1758) in which they prohibited the search of the reincarnations outside of Tibet.

This “guidance” was an order to follow for both the Dalai and the Panchen Lama and they respected it. After the death of the second *ḡebcundamba* (1757), the delegation tasked with finding the new incarnation only conducted its search on Tibetan ground. This later became the norm and they did not break away from this tradition even later; its influence is felt even today on the social role of the head of the Mongolian Buddhist church.

THE THIRD INCARNATION

He was the first in the line of Mongolian Buddhist church leaders who was, following the Manchu emperor’s order, found on Tibetan land. An imperial decree in 1761 announced that the incarnation appeared in Tibet.

The Third *Bogd Gegēn* was born in 1758 in Dohan Litang. During his monastery education, after taking his vows he received the *lḡdambīnyam* (Tib. *ye shes bstan pa’i nyi ma*) monastic name. The Mongols did not receive the third *ḡebcundamba* very warmly. As he was the first non-Mongolian who possessed this title, mistrust aimed towards him was not only visible from the secular society, but from the lamas as well. Around the time of inauguration in Urga (Ix xūrē, 1763/4), they even prepared another child, an “anti- *bogd gegēn*” in Bayanxongor county to become the ecclesiastical dignity. They even built a monastery for him. This was unprecedented before in the history of the Mongolian Buddhist church’s head lamas. As a sign of this hostile reception even the highest Manchu regional officer asked him not to settle down in Urga, but rather in Dolōn nūr, Inner Mongolia. He was not willing to comply though.

He lived a short life. He left his reincarnation at the age of barely reaching sixteen in 1773. As a testament to the hostility surrounding him, in his autobiography the fifth *xutagt* later alluded to the possibility that his death was not natural, his life was probably ended by the lamas. His remains can be found at the Dambadarḡa monastery.

THE FOURTH INCARNATION

The fourth incarnation was born in the year of the wood (female) goat, in 1775 and lived for a far longer lifespan of 38 years. Before discovering him, rumors swirled about the possibility that he might reincarnate in Mongolia again and that his mother would be the Tūsiyetū khan’s wife. The woman however, contrary to the prophecies, gave birth to a baby girl; thus, they searched for and found the next incarnation of the head of the Mongolian Buddhist church on Tibetan ground again. The fourth incarnation was the nephew of the Eighth Dalai Lama. He took his first monastic vow at the age of four in front of the Dalai Lama at the Potala Palace and that was when he received his monastic name, *Luwsantūwdenḡigmedwančig* (Tib. *blo bzang thub bstan dbang phyug ḡjigs med rgya mtso*) as well. Three years later, he departed to the Mongolian capital. His travels took him through Dolōn nūr, where he took the *gecul* (Tib. *dge tshul*) vow in front of the *ḡanḡa xutagt* (Mong. *ḡangḡiy-a quturḡtu*), Rolpai dorḡe (1717-1786, Tib. *lcang skya rol pa’i rdo rje*).

When the head of the Buddhist church arrived in Urga the Mongols did not welcome him with overwhelming joy. Due to his Tibetan origin, even the Mongolian lamas

received him with skepticism and distrust. They nicknamed him the *dogšin dūri* (Mong. *doysi dūri*), the ‘angry re-incarnation’. He could not suffer laziness, debauchery among the lamas, he frequently issued corporal punishments and often times even he himself carried out the floggings.

After reaching adulthood he travelled to the Manchu court. Similarly to his predecessors, the emperor reaffirmed his prerogatives and as a result he basically acknowledged him as the head of the Mongol Buddhist church. After his inauguration, he was warned that in the secular part of life the emperor’s rule was absolute and he could have no say in it.

Thus, he devoted his life first and foremost to the strengthening of the church and the continued spreading of Buddhism. He built monasteries, brought several religious objects, and sculptures from Tibet, translated and had others copy several Buddhist books. Shortly after his arrival in Mongolia, he already raised the number of monks living at the Canid *dacan* from three hundred to a thousand. From 1797, he started a program to enrich the libraries of Mongolian monasteries with the help of the Manchu dynasty. In 1806, he established the Dečinglaw *dugan*, at the age of 32 he founded the Dūinxor *dacan*. Even today, these remain important centers of the Mongol Buddhism.

In 1813, during his trip from Beijing to Urga he wanted to pay a visit to the Wutaishan, but he fell gravely ill during the journey and soon after leaving the mountain behind he died. His remains were transported back to Mongolia in a stupa and were placed in a separate shrine at the Amarbaigalant monastery.

THE FIFTH INCARNATION

The fifth *bogd gegēn*, Luwsancültemjigmiddambijancan (Tib. blo bzang tshul khriṃs ’jigs med bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan) was born in 1815 into the family of a wealthy Tibetan commoner not far from the Potala Palace. Shortly after finding him, the Beijing court ordered the Khalkha nobility to present the *xutagt* with a yellow corded yurt. Since it was customary to present this symbol of power to the *Bogd Gegēn* at the Manchu court, this order was a subtle hint that they did not find it necessary for the head of the Mongolian Buddhist church to pay a visit to the court in Beijing.

The new incarnation departed directly to the Khalkha region, to Da xūrē in 1820, where the Manchu regional official, the *amban* gave him all the prerogatives that were his due on account of his station. A year later, according to the by then traditional convention he sent the “nine white” gifts to the Manchu emperor; thus, acknowledging him as his overlord. At the age of sixteen, he gained the *gecul* vow that was followed by his *gelen* (Tib. *dge slong*) vow by the age of 21.

The fifth *jebcundamba* was a rather insubstantial figure compared to his predecessors. He was as easily influenced by the Mongol lamas as by the court in Beijing. He asked for permission from the Manchus even to travel to Tibet to take his monastic vow. As the religious leader, his work was mainly characterized by increasing the number of monasteries in Mongolia and enriching certain *dacans*. After longer journeys, when he arrived back to the capital he had a Maitreya (Khalkha Maidar) shrine built at the age of 22 (the year of the fire monkey, 1836). During the years, he

established more than 2000 accommodations for lamas, *dacans* and monasteries. In the end, he moved to the Gandan monastery in the year of the gold dog (1838) which led to the building of the shrines and the significant expansion of the buildings. He created new *dacans* inside the monastery or in its near vicinity and this was the reason how the Gandan monastery became the spiritual center of Buddhist life of the capital and later the whole country as well.

After a long wait, in 1839 he finally got the permission to travel to Beijing and thus, he spent the New Year's celebrations of 1840 there. He intended to travel to and settle down in Tibet for the remainder of his life, but his plan never took place as he died due to an illness in 1842.

His biography was written by a lama named Sinje who, feeding his thought into the deceased head lama's mouth, strongly criticized the Buddhist church's moral situation.

The remains of the *bogd gegēn* were placed in a stupa in one of the temples of the Gandan monastery to rest there for eternity.

THE SIXTH INCARNATION

The sixth incarnation, Luwsandambijalcan (Tib. blo bzang dpal ldan rgyal mtshan, vagy blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan) had a tragically short life. He filled his position for only 39 days before he died at the tender age of 6. He, as the majority of his predecessors, was born in Tibet. He was born in 1842 into the family of a donkey herder. The delegation tasked with searching for him was already followed by misfortune. They fall victim to robbers several times; according to the accounts they were robbed of hundreds of horses and camels.

Finally, even though they succeeded in escorting the *xutagt* to Urga in one piece, after his arrival he soon fell ill. First, he coughed. Then, he contracted smallpox that eventually led to his death. His body was placed in the Saḷini badarayuluḡči monastery.

THE SEVENTH INCARNATION

The seventh incarnation was born in 1850 near Lhasa as the son of a Tibetan commoner, Migmar and a year later he got officially recognized as the new reincarnation. In 1854, he took the sacraments from the *corj* lama of Urga and received his monastic name, Ḳebcun Agwančoiḡwančugperenleiḡamc (Tib. ngag bdang chos kyi dbang phyug 'phrin las rgya mtsho) from him as well.

He arrived in Urga in 1855; however, he only started his studies at the age of seven. Unfortunately, even though his period is relatively closer in time to ours, only relatively few remaining documents exist about and in connection to him. We can learn more about his life and his deeds through Buddhist biographies and narratives that are, surprisingly, often quite unforgiving towards him, than from documents.

His reign was not the brightest period of the Mongol Buddhist church. What is more, the moral debauchery, that his predecessors already criticized, continued. The head lama also took part in the bacchanalia, he drank, bedded women and rumor has it that he was fond of male company as well to the shock of many lamas, who even lodged a formal complaint about his sinful behavior to the Manchu *amban*. The general antipathy

towards him continued to grow not only because of his lifestyle, but because of his obvious Tibetan origin as well.

Dandar, an educated lama who lived a generation after him wrote about the Mongolian Buddhist church in one of his works as thus:

“It is very unfortunate that the Khutuktu and the Mongol nobility so shamelessly run after the profit, fornicate and drink as dogs who tasted blood ... These unscrupulous lamas are the ones stifling the people and bloody them with their spurs ... They show complete disregard towards the law and the scripture while they run after their sinful desires to their heart’s content. They have a lama name, wear the yellow robes of the church and praise themselves to the heavens, they who take others’ riches for their own. It is difficult indeed to call them monks and it is impossible to consider any of them as commoners.” (Bawden 1989:171)

This is a heavy summary that is generous in criticism.

He was very dependent on the Manchu emperor’s favor as well. In 1864, he asked for permission even to leave the capital in order to travel to the Amarbayasgalant monastery. After a short and quite undignified life he died on the 13th day of the 11th month of 1868.

The seventh *xutagt* played a far more insignificant political role in history than his successor. Still, a few events also happened during the period of his reign that were fundamental in the shaping of the situation of the Khalkha regions in the 20th century as well. This period was unequivocally the period of decline for the Manchu dynasty and the czarist Russian government, aided by this decline and its Siberian hinterlands, paid more and more attention to the Mongolian territories. In 1861, the Russians opened a commerce consulate in Urga and the competition between the traditionally present Chinese merchants and the Russian newcomers, who were discovering new markets, began. This initial trading and economic clash of interests later brought about the new era of political rivalry – though it must be added that this was far from the first or the last time – between the two countries with the aim of gaining authority over the Mongolian territories. This race brought about first a gradual Russian expansion during the eighth *Bogd Gegēn*’s time; then, from the 3rd decade of the 20th century their complete victory.

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